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ABSTRACT

The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) utilize the state mandated testing of students in grades 3, 5 and 8 with the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) as an accountability index. The district has set objectives to be met by teachers and students. The Department of Instructional Research, Testing, and Evaluation (IRTE) District Program Evaluators act as school liaisons. They offer assistance to teachers in test interpretation, program evaluation, research data, and planning for instructional strategies. Reports to teachers are concise and present data in understandable language. Building test representatives are appointed by the principal to coordinate school testing activities. The results of state testing are communicated to the public through a press conference, followed by a publication which gives a thorough explanation of test results. It is distributed as a newspaper supplement. The district test scores have indicated progress in student achievement attributable to the procedures outlined in this report. (DWH)

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HELPING TEACHERS HELP STUDENTS:
ACHIEVEMENT TESTING AS INPUT TO THE
INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

A pervasive theme in educational arenas is the use of achievement test results of students as the major accountability index for schools and school districts. Recently, in national dialogues on such topics as merit pay and teacher evaluation, student achievement on standardized tests has been cited as the objective vestige of effectiveness. In the Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) the department of Instructional Research, Testing, and Evaluation (IRTE) has dedicated time and the skills of District Program Evaluators to redirect commonly held misconceptions about the uses of test scores so that school administrators will know the instructional ramifications of test results, school staffs will be better able to help prepare their students for testing academically and logistically, and the community will gain an understanding of the complexity and appropriate uses of achievement test results.

OBJECTIVES

Concern for the proper use of achievement test results in APS has been translated into a process which utilizes the state mandated testing of all students in grades 3, 5, and 8 with the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS). The objectives of this process are as follows:

1. To prepare school and district administrators to use CTBS results as one of the inputs into a dynamic curriculum modification planning process.
2. To help teachers understand CTBS results as part of instructional feedback which aids in the description of the successes in the teaching/learning process.
3. To prepare teachers with a general knowledge of the skills measured by the test. This information allows teachers to

prepare instructional strategies which sequence and reinforce learning experiences that prepare students in commonly agreed basic skills.

4. To equip teachers to teach and provide practice in test taking skills so that students know how to approach standardized achievement tests.
5. To help teachers prepare students so that they are able to demonstrate their level of achievement on a standardized test.

METHODS

Several coordinated processes have been used to focus on the above mentioned objectives. IRTE is responsible for leadership in the district regarding analysis, interpretation, and use of test data. The following briefly describes the processes which are orchestrated under the auspices of IRTE to accomplish the above mentioned stated objectives.

SCHOOL LIAISON

IRTE District Program Evaluators are assigned to a number of schools within certain geographical areas of the district. For each of their assigned schools, District Program Evaluators offer direct assistance regarding interpretation of test results, evaluation of existing school programs to determine effectiveness and efficacy, research to add to the body of knowledge of which decisions for modification are based, and input into planning for improved instructional strategies. This interaction helps teachers focus on the skills that are highlighted as group strengths by test data and the skills that require greater attention. Sample Item Documents have been prepared by IRTE so that teachers may examine items

similar in content and format to test items that are commonly missed by their students without compromising actual test items. The Sample Item Documents emphasize the teaching of general skills areas minimizing the temptation to teach specific test items. In 1982 the state mandate required the use of a new test, CTBS Form U. The new test has been held secure, but test scores have continued to rise supporting the teaching of skills as characterized in the Sample Item Documents.

Thorough examination of test data guided by District Program Evaluators usually reveals patterns of incorrect responses which may suggest instructional areas for which more or different materials should be provided, or teacher reinforcement of specific concepts should be planned in the general instructional program, or the sequence of learning experiences should be changed, or some combination of these interventions to enhance the skills acquisition of students.

REPORT WRITING

All reporting formats for the presentation of test data have been modified to maximize instructional usefulness. Teachers receive reports of results for both individuals and groups of students in their classrooms, building administrators receive school reports highlighting trends in test data from year to year, and upper administration receives district reports which summarize results for each grade level tested. All reports are concise and present data which is written in understandable language.

BUILDING TEST REPRESENTATIVES

Each year school principals appoint a faculty member to coordinate testing activities for the school. These building test representatives attend district workshops presented by the District Coordinator of Testing

(IRTE) and are responsible for sharing the information with and training faculty members who serve as test administrators in their schools. Typical workshops cover such topics as the following:

- Planning for the best test environment,
- Preparing teachers to serve as test administrators,
- Preparing teachers to use practice booklets as a teaching tool so that students are familiar with test taking skills,
- Understanding analysis and interpretation of test results,
- Utilizing classroom, school, and district reports as one source of input to the curriculum/instruction process, and
- Explaining test results and implications to parents and/or the community.

All uses of test data support educators as the decision makers regarding which educational programs and processes are best for students. The limitations of test data and the practical limits of the application of test data are emphasized..

THE COMMUNITY AND THE MEDIA

The results of state mandated testing are released to the public in two ways. First, a press conference is held for representatives of the media in the metropolitan area. During the press conference the District Report is presented by the District Coordinator of Testing, with commentary by the Director of Instructional Research, Testing, and Evaluation; the Superintendent; and the President of the School Board. A question and answer period follows to clarify any misunderstandings of the data prior to public release. Generally, immediate radio, television, and newspaper coverage of test results follows the press conference.

Second, a publication that gives a thorough explanation of the test results is released as an insert in the Sunday morning edition of the local newspaper. This publication is used to educate the community regarding the limitations, uses and misuses of test scores, and to demonstrate the efforts being made by professional educators to design a dynamic system to fulfill the educational needs of all students in the district. Members of the IRTE professional staff present test results with careful interpretation and explanation to parent and community groups on request.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Over the past few years district test scores have shown continual growth in student achievement. Even with a change of test instrument used in the state mandated testing program in 1982, there has been steady improvement in district test scores (see graphs attached). The IRTE staff, building administrators, and upper administration believe that continuous student progress on the state mandated standardized achievement test is due, at least in part, to the practical, useful focus and approaches outlined as key components of the above mentioned process. Testing time is better spent and more easily accepted when test results are used to improve the delivery of curriculum and instruction. "Helping teachers help students..." characterizes the process for test data utilization that the Albuquerque Public Schools has found to be educationally sound.

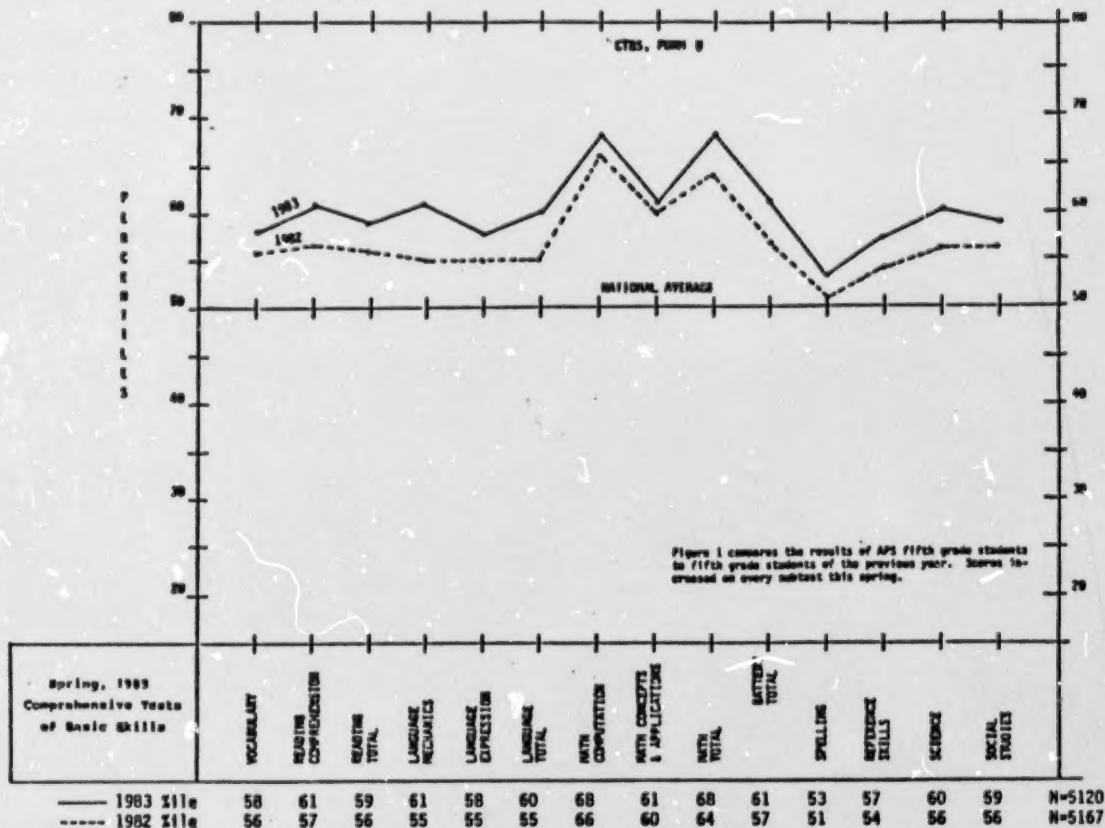


FIGURE 1. APS 1983 AVERAGE PERCENTILE SCORES, Grade 5

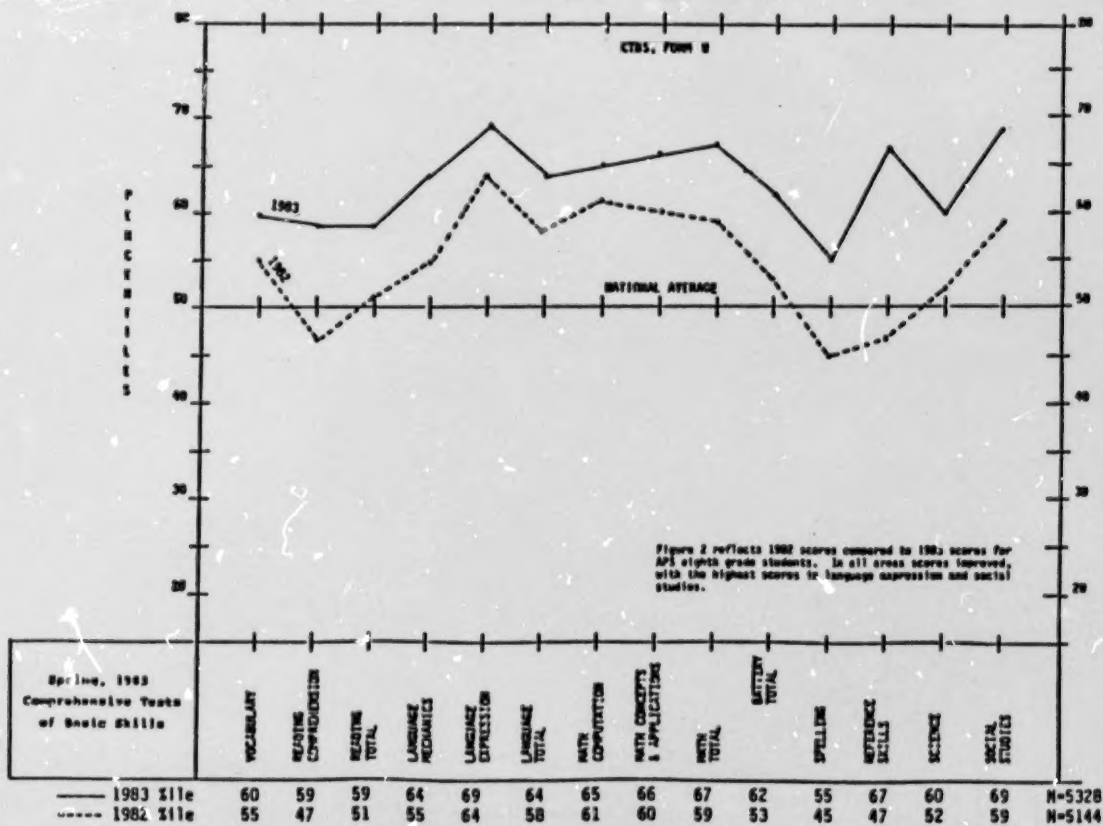


FIGURE 2. APS 1983 AVERAGE PERCENTILE SCORES, Grade 8

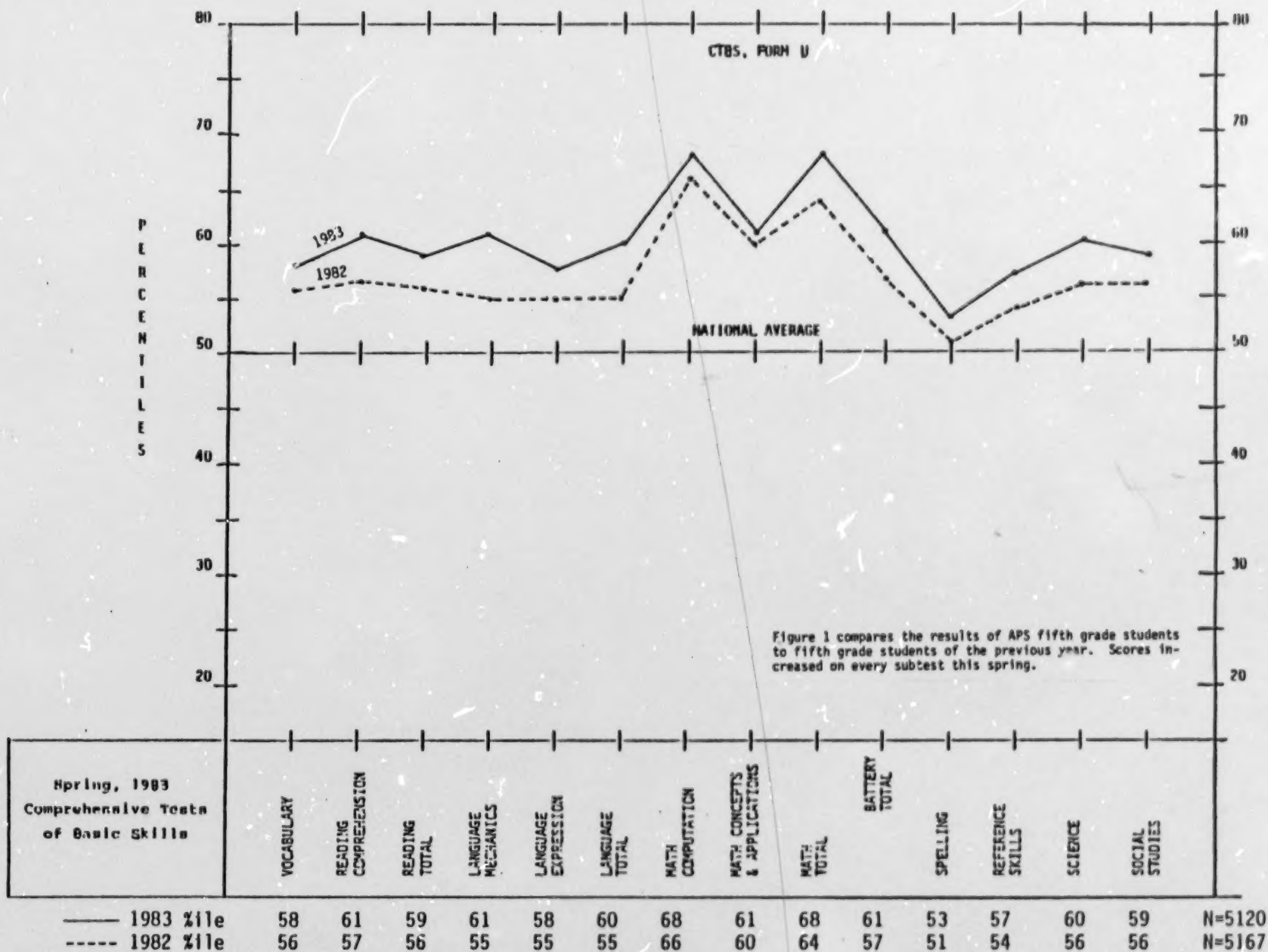


FIGURE 1. APS 1983 AVERAGE PERCENTILE SCORES, Grade 5

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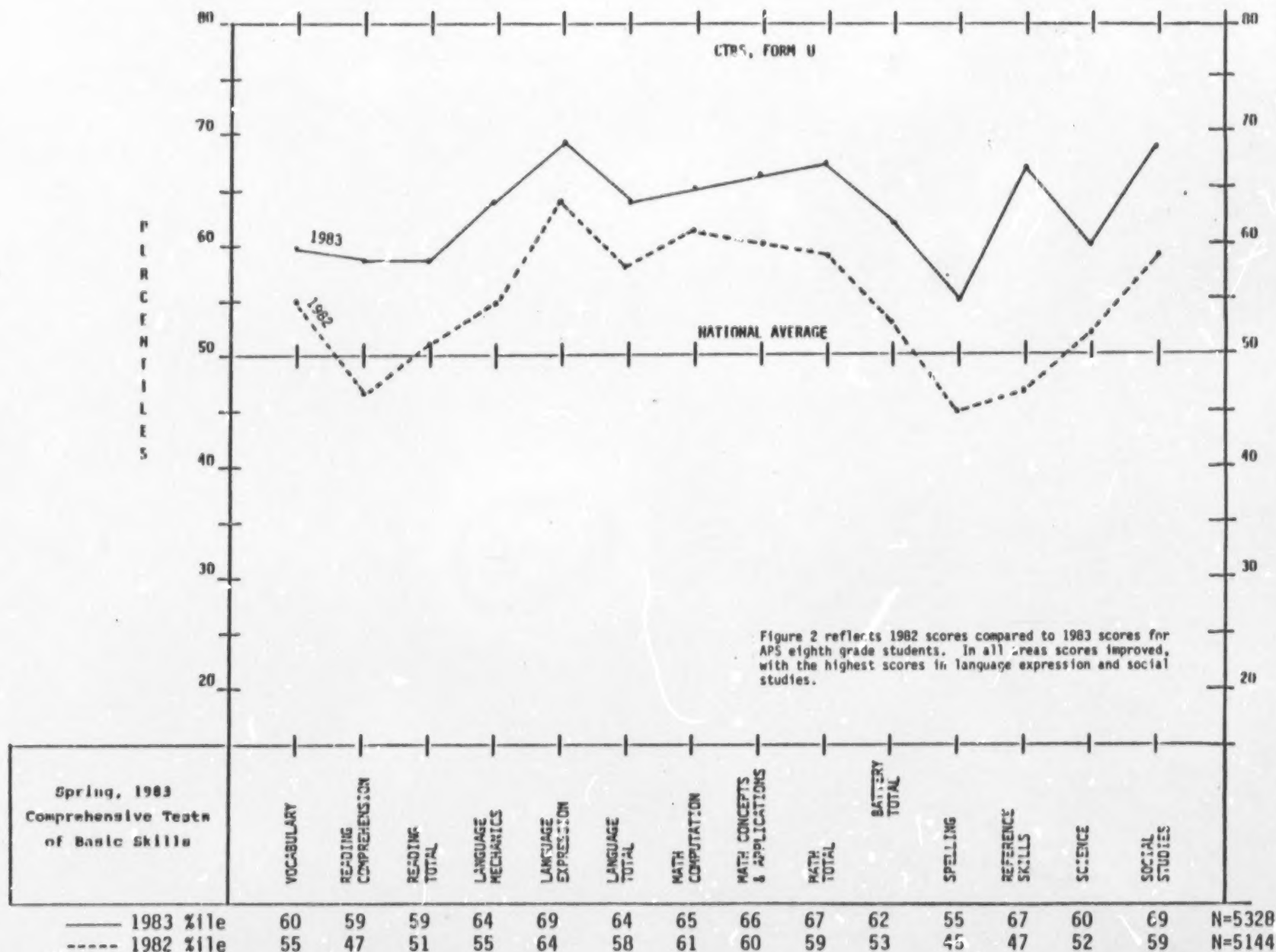


FIGURE 2. APS 1983 AVERAGE PERCENTILE SCORES, Grade 8

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